

Theme: “Christmas Traditions” – Family Time

Text: 1 John 3:1-5 (NKJV)

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. ⁴ Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. ⁵ And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.

If you were to rank in order the importance of the “**Christmas Traditions**” we’ve looked at during this Advent season where would you put today’s in that ranking? We’ve considered **Gift giving, Decorations, and Christmas Carols**. Today we’ll consider **Family Time**. Where does that one rank for you?

For those of you who are adults, especially parents and grandparents, I would guess that it ranks really high. It would be number one on my list, easily. In fact, if you were given a choice: You can have **Family Time** this Christmas with all of your family gathered together, but you’d get to have none of the other 3 “**Christmas Traditions**” we looked at this Advent season—no gifts, no decorations, no Christmas carols—you’d make that choice to have **Family Time** anyway? I would. In a heartbeat!

Time with family during the Christmas holiday season is that important. It’s is such a treasure! Think of all the Christmas carols dedicated to going “home” to be with our **family** for Christmas: “I’ll be home for Christmas,” “There’s No Place Like Home for the Holidays,” etc. There really is nothing like the warmth of being gathered with **family** members around the soft glow of Christmas tree as you exchange presents and share love and joy with each other at Christmas. This desire to be with **family**, especially during Christmastime, is right and good and is an important part of our “**Christmas Traditions**.”

However, is it the most important part? Our **family** is certainly one of the greatest blessings God has given us on this earth. Those of us whose families are separated by many miles have a great appreciation for the joy that being reunited with family this time of year can bring.

But for many it has become the main point of the holiday for many people. **Family** has become the “reason for the season.” Being with **family** or preparing the meal for the **family** has become, in many people’s eyes, a valid excuse not to worship and celebrate the birth of the One whom Christmas really is “all about”—**JESUS!** When I think about this I’m reminded of Jesus’ words of warning. He once said, “**He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me**” (Matthew 10:37).

Why did Jesus have to say such a thing? Because family and **family time** really isn’t that important; because **family** really isn’t that great of a blessing? No! Because **family** is such a great blessing, that’s why Jesus gave us this warning! Jesus knows our human nature. He knows that the greater the gift, the greater the temptation to love that gift more than the Giver! And what a temptation this is! We’ll do just about anything for our **family**; sacrifice time, money, even give up our life itself. But for Jesus? Giving Him an hour or two at Christmas or on a Sunday is just too much to ask! As important as **family** is and as great a blessing as our **families** are, **family time** is not what Christmas is all about. **JESUS** is!

I’d like to remind all of us today that we can truly have a blessed “Christmas” no matter where we are or who we’re with because of two “**families**” that are, in truth, even more important than our earthly **family**.

The first is the **family** our Gospel reading reminded us of just a few minutes earlier. As we review the “Christmas Story,” as it’s recorded for us in the Gospels, we hear about a humble *mother*, Mary, who accepted the angel’s words that she would bear God’s holy Son, Jesus, and said, **“Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38)**. We see a faithful *father*, Joseph who believed the angel’s word that the child Mary had conceived was not a result of unfaithfulness, but was actually the Son of God conceived in her by the Holy Spirit, and did not hesitate to take Mary as his wife and make Jesus his legal Son (**Matthew 1:18-25**). Most importantly, we hear about a *child* of whom God’s heavenly angels proclaimed would be a **“Savior”** from sin for **“all people” (Luke 2:11)**; a Savior who would bring **“peace”** and **“goodwill” (Luke 2:14)** between God and man by taking all the punishment for mankind’s sins upon Himself on the cross.

“The Christmas Story” also reminds us of one other **“family”** member: a “Father,” more important even than Joseph in the Christmas account—**God the Father!** It is because of His love and His faithfulness that He was able to make us members of the second **“family”** spoken of in our sermon text for this morning: **“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” (v. 1).**

That is the most important **family** we belong to—yes, even more important than our earthly families, and we know what a great blessing they are! Listen again to John’s incredible words: **“Beloved, now we are children of God” (v. 2)**. In His Word God gives His believers a number of wonderful names: we are His servants, a holy nation, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, His soldiers, etc. But by far the dearest term of all is that He calls us His **“children!”** This is not just some honorary title either—He has literally *adopted* us into His family, making us His sons and daughters and brothers and sisters of His Son Jesus!

How? The last verse of our text tells us, first of all, that it was through Jesus and the forgiveness He came to bring us when He came to this earth as one of us at Christmas: **“He was manifested [“made known”] to take away our sins” (v. 5)**. That forgiveness was made our own and our adoption papers were signed, sealed, and delivered to us personally, so to speak, when God’s Holy Spirit worked in our hearts the miracle of faith at our baptism. Paul writes in Galatians, **“For you are all sons [“heirs”] of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:26-27)**.

This is the incredible “gift” we have been given we should celebrate at Christmas: Our adoption into God’s **family** through our Savior and Brother, Jesus Christ! Why don’t we always realize what an incredible gift this “adoption” into God’s **family** is for us? Well, part of the reason, John tells us, is that we can’t even fully conceptualize this blessing this side of heaven!

Have you ever had a gift under the tree at Christmas that you just couldn’t wait to open? Maybe the size of the package, or the shape of the present had you wondering with great excitement and anticipation just what exactly it was? Do you remember how you couldn’t wait to open it? Well, in a sense, that is what John is saying about the great “gift” of our adoption into God’s **family**. He says, **Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (v. 2)**.

At times in this life, being a “child of God” may not seem like all that great a gift. Oftentimes it means that we will be called to suffer or give up our own desires and pleasures for the sake of God and His kingdom. We might be misunderstood, mistreated, and abused by this world, possibly even by our own earthly **family** because of our faith in Christ. At times in this life we may not feel like we’re special, or even that we’re loved completely as the “children of God.”

But, as John tells us, “**When [Jesus] is revealed,**” that is, when He comes again on the Last Day, we will know! For he goes on to say, “**we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is!**” (v. 2).

What’s that going to be like to be like Jesus? To see Jesus as He really is? What’s it going to feel like to have our bodies perfectly glorified? What’s it going to be like living in perfect joy and peace without sin death and sorrow for all eternity? John tells us, we don’t really know yet, “**it has not yet been revealed what we shall be**” (v. 2a). Our ultimate glorification in heaven as God’s children is like the biggest, shiniest, most exciting present ever to sit under a tree. And it has been given *freely* to you and me! It is waiting for us, not under a Christmas tree, but under the “tree” of the cross! That’s where this great gift of our adoption into God’s **family** was bought!

The other reason we don’t always realize what an incredible gift this adoption into God’s **family** really is, is because we don’t always understand or realize where it is we were and what our situation was before we were made “**children of God.**” There was nothing we did to deserve this adoption. There was nothing we could do to earn it either. At our birth into this life we were not in God’s family. We were lost. We were spiritually dead in our sins and headed for eternal death. In fact the Bible tells us that by nature we were actually enemies of God (**Romans 8:7**)! We didn’t love Him; by nature we didn’t even want to be rescued! But He loved us! Despite our unlovable-ness and hostility towards Him, God came to us with His Son Jesus, saw us in the eternal cage of our sin, and had compassion on us. He reached into history—into our *personal* history—and adopted us into His **family**! He chose us, we did not choose Him! Listen again to the words from our text, “**Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!**” (v. 1).

Yes, our earthly **family** is a great blessing and a great gift from God. Treasure your **family**, especially the **family time** you get with them over the holidays. Tell them how much you love them and how much you appreciate them! What a great joy and blessing it is to be able to celebrate the birth of our Savior with our **family**! In this life there are few blessings that are greater. But let’s remember, at Christmastime, and always our most important **family**: The family that has been made ours through faith, our *spiritual* family: God the Father, Jesus His Son, we, His brothers and sisters; the very sons and daughters of God our Father! By faith, then, I have never actually spent a Christmas away from my **family**! And neither have you! No matter where you are, no matter who you’re with or not with—even if you’re by yourself—through Christ, you will have **family time** for all eternity! Rejoice in that great gift and give praise to the Giver! Amen.